

THE TREASURES OF TEMPLOM-DOMB Archeological Research into Medieval Dabas

TIBOR ÁKOS RÁCZ

In the fall and winter of 2007 the central core of medieval Dabas was successfully located during a preventive archeological excavation on an area of one hectare performed due to the construction of a supermarket. This section of the village, which contained ten semisubterranean houses and several post structures on the surface, was destroyed in a fire in the 14th century. The remains of the burnt-down structures and the objects used in everyday life survived essentially untouched, which is an extraordinarily rare and fortunate circumstance in archeological research. The Templom-domb (church hill) site in Dabas has yielded some of the most abundant finds from an archeologically studied medieval Hungarian rural settlement.

THE MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENT

The village of “Dobos” is first noted in a royal bequest of 1264, and in the 14th century it was part of the estates of a minor aristocratic family by the name of Dabasi. Together with the neighboring communities it was a typical village of the lower nobility, and on the basis of the 1464 division of the estates each family had one demesne and one or two plots of land held in villeinage (jobbágytelek).¹ After the Long War (1591–1606), according to the 1628 census of the bishopric of Vác, it was an abandoned, “deserta”, settlement.² Present-day Dabas was resettled in the 18th century to the southeast of its medieval predecessor. Therefore, the former village survived in a condition favorable for research, and its territory is within the agricultural/industrial zone that is just now being developed.

Almost without exception Hungarian medieval village excavations have documented the traces of settlements abandoned by their inhabitants, vacated houses and ditches. Groups of finds that represent outstanding value or complex architectural solutions that stand out from the ordinary are rarely uncovered. Following the 14th century fire in Dabas, the ruins were partially cleared away, which is evidenced by numerous pits containing ashy fill, clay debris and burned fragments of pottery (Fig. 1). At the same time, several houses have preserved the household items for everyday use of the former inhabitants, such as agricultural tools, horse gear and lock mechanisms, and these are of great interest to us. The buildings that they inhabited or used at this time can be clearly differentiated on the basis of the evidence



Fig. 1: The beehive-shaped pits used for crop storage before the fire were filled with sooty, ashy debris, daub and trash that preserve the memory of the devastation. (The photographs of the excavation and the objects were taken by Tibor Ákos RÁCZ.)

¹ Magyar, Eszter: Dabas és környéke a középkorban (Dabas and Its Surroundings in the Middle Ages). In: *Tanulmányok a 700 éves Dabas történetéből* (Essays from Dabas’s 700 Years of History), ed. Petri, Edit (Dabas: Dabas Nagyközségi Tanács, 1975), 30–54.

² Párdányi, Miklós: Dabas és környéke története a török hódoltság korától az 1848. évi forradalomig (1526–1848) (History of Dabas and Its Surroundings from the Ottoman Turkish Occupation to the Revolution of 1848 [1526–1848]). In: *Tanulmányok a 700 éves Dabas történetéből* (Essays from Dabas’s 700 Years of History), ed. Petri, Edit (Dabas: Dabas Nagyközségi Tanács, 1975), 55–115.

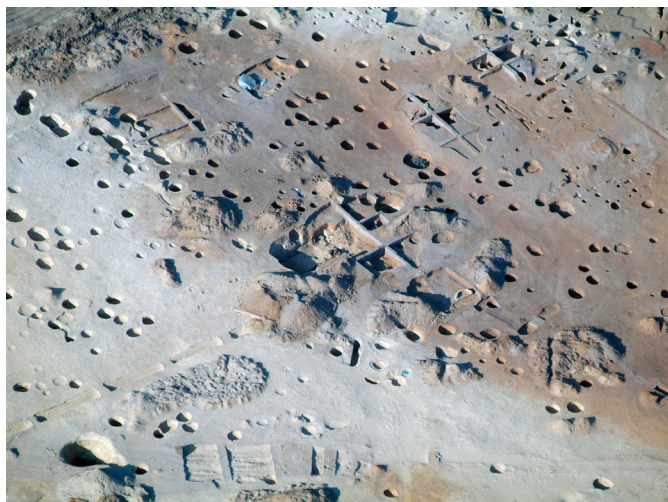


Fig. 2: The settlement structure is clearly visible in the aerial photographs: above is the row of single-room semisubterranean houses, in the middle is house No. 223, and below is the section of the road leading to the church that was uncovered (aerial photograph by Attila Zsoldos).

Fig. 3: In the single-room house No. 270 we found a round oven, a rammed clay floor, remains of broken beams and several intact pots.

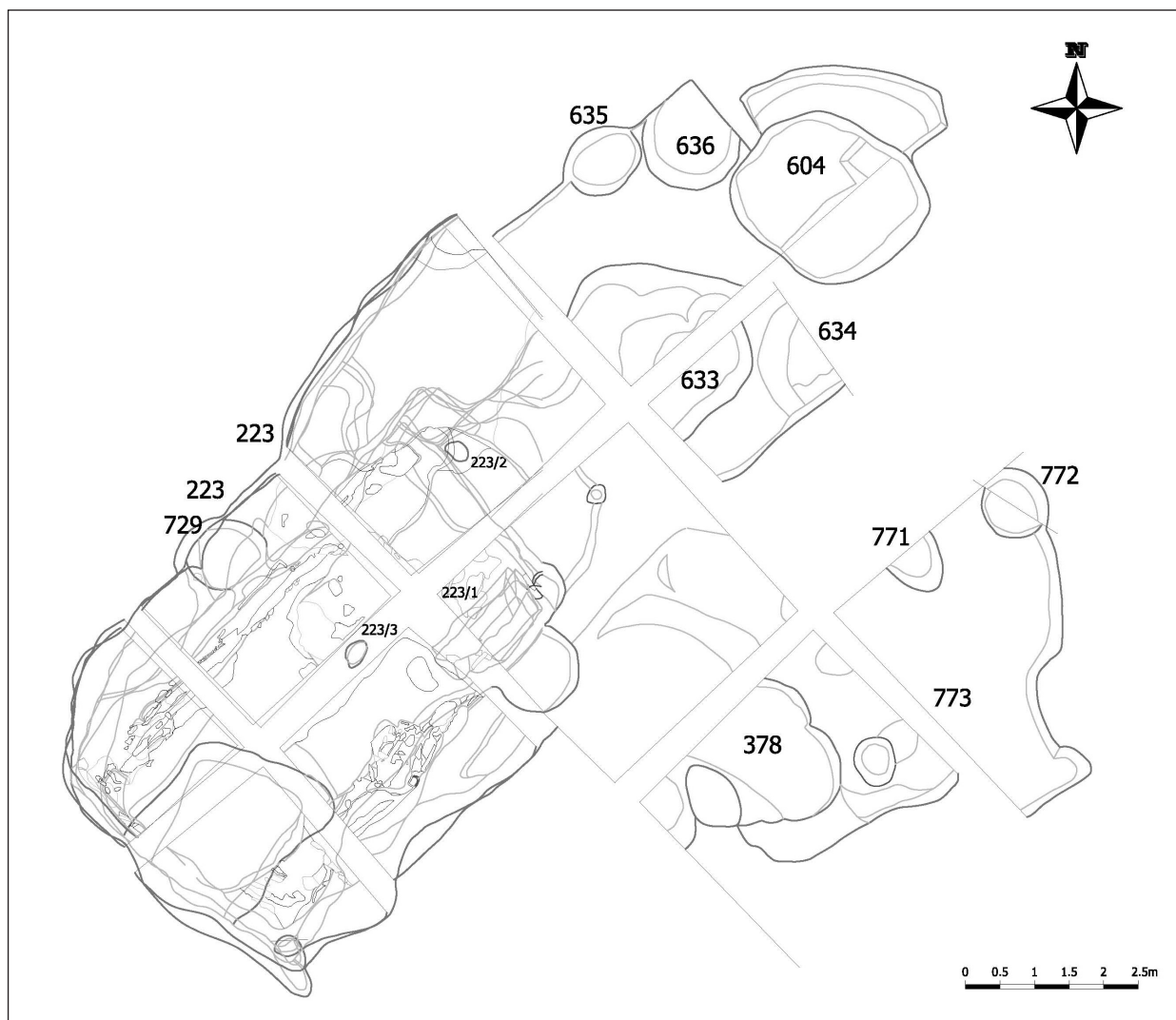


Fig. 4: Ground plan of house No. 223 and the surrounding trenches (drawing by Benedek Érdi)

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of the fire, which is also important data, since only in unusual cases are the material finds able to be dated more precisely than within several decades. On the basis of these houses that were destroyed all at once, we can make reliable deductions about the structure of the settlement.

In the area we excavated we have been able to differentiate two groups of buildings, one in the southwestern section and one in the northeastern section. The road that runs between them led to the medieval church (Fig. 2). The group of buildings in the northeast is comprised of sunken, single-room, post-framed structures with round ovens (Fig. 3) surrounding a house that was twice their size, with a cellar and presumably two rooms, and heated by a tile stove (feature 223, Fig. 4). The additional buildings were organized around the largest, most prestigious dwelling. Considering the amount and quality of material finds, the difference between the central house and those surrounding it is quite prominent. In comparison with the few dozen fragments of pots, bottles and sometimes cups or mugs in the simpler structures, ten to twenty times the finds were found in building 223, and in addition to the aforementioned types of vessels the set of household ceramic utensils included various jugs, strainers, pans, large storage vessels and lids, as well as an imported Austrian pot with a trademark. We are not able to work out the structure of the central building precisely because we were only able to document its cellar, the ruins of its dividing wall and the side wall that was clad in pine boards (Fig. 5). Its owner may have been a well-off noble. The clear evidence of the presence of the social elite is the gold and gilded objects, such as the cloisonné earring (Fig. 6) or the ducat of the Venetian doge Andrea Contarini. Most of these were discovered as stray finds from the entire excavation area during the stripping of the topsoil with an excavator.

In 2008 and then in 2010, in connection with the construction of roads leading into the present-day city, the opportunity arose for us to study the periphery of the settlement. The excavations performed on the rights-of-way of the roads can only be considered narrow exploratory ditches within the extensive archeological site, but despite this they have provided important evidence. It has come to light that around the middle of the Árpád Dynasty period, settlement was still sparse, and the small, sunken houses were located at greater distances from one another. Dwellings became concentrated on the Templom-domb area from the 13th–14th century, organized around the town's church that had been erected by that time.

In most cases the data from settlement archeology do not make it possible to discuss socio-historical issues.³ Exceptions to this are the Kána excavation, where it was possible to examine the entire settlement unit (village, church and cemetery) with archeological methods, and the planned excavation of medieval Szentkirály, where



Fig. 5: Detail of house No. 223 with the rammed clay dividing wall, the debris from the tile stove and the carbonized wood paneling of the side wall



Fig. 6: A genuinely special find is the gilded, cloisonné copper earring fitted with a loop ending in an S-curve.

³ Rácz, Tibor Ákos: Social differences within rural settlement types in the central area of the Hungarian Kingdom between the 10th and the 14th centuries / Soziale Unterschiede in ländlichen Siedlungen des 10. bis 14. Jahrhunderts im Kernland des Königreichs Ungarn. In: *Hierarchies in rural settlements*. Ruralia IX. Ed.: Klápště, Jan. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers n. v., 2013), 423–435.

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based upon the detailed observations it was not only possible to reconstruct the layout of the settlement's separate lots, but partly also the village community's field system.⁴ Social separation in rural settlements can be indicated by differences in the material finds or in architectural solutions, as well as by characteristics of the settlement structure. The medieval village of Dabas is an outstanding example of this. The use of the house with a cellar and two rooms as well as the ordinary village pit-dwellings alongside one another in place and time is also important from the aspect of the development of Hungarian dwellings. The major social transformations that began in the second half of the 13th century and came to a close in the 14th century brought changes to every area of life. The system of agricultural production was transformed, villages were laid out in regular patterns and the so-called 'plains dwelling house' archetype appeared in the vernacular architecture of commoners. New types of heating devices, tile stoves, were employed in these structures, and their early appearance, in the 14th century, has been proven at more and more archeological sites.⁵

THE CHURCH AND THE CEMETERY

In 2012, with understandable curiosity, we began investigations into the church ruins as well as into the cemetery around the church. The opportunity for this was provided by the construction of a memorial displaying the remains and the ground plan of the church. Written sources inform us that the stones



Fig. 7: The foundation ditches of the former church appeared as ditch-like trenches loosely filled with broken stone and sandy mortar.



Fig. 8: The Sigismund-era coin found by metal detector in a fragment of plastering together with the parvus coin discovered in the foundation precisely dated the late medieval church.

⁴ Terei, György: Az Árpád-kori Kána falu / Kána, a Village from the Arpadian Era (Twelfth–Thirteenth Centuries). In: *A középkor és a kora újkor régészete Magyarországon/ Archaeology of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period in Hungary*, ed. Benkő, Elek – Kovács, Gyöngyi (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Régészeti Intézete, 2010), 81–111; Pálóczi Horváth, András: Az elpusztult késő középkori falvak morfológiai variációi / The Morphological Variations of the Ruined Villages from the Late Medieval Ages. *Arrabona* 44 (2006)/1, 357–390.

⁵ Laszlovszky, József: Készközépkori falusi lakóház Tiszaugon. Az alföldi lakóház kialakulásának kérdéséhez / The Late Medieval Rural House at Tiszaug. Data Relating to the Emergence of Medieval Peasant Houses at the Great Hungarian Plain. In: *Testis Temporum, Vita Memoriae. Ünnepi tanulmányok Pálóczi Horváth András 65. születésnapjára* (Essays Celebrating the 65th Birthday of András Pálóczi Horváth). *Studia Caroliensia. A Károlyi Gáspár Református Egyetem folyóirata* (Journal of the Károlyi Gáspár Reformed University) (2006)/3–4, 295–314.



Fig. 9: Detail of the churchyard cemetery with the remains of a wall from the Árpád Dynasty church in the background



Fig. 10: The approximate reconstruction of the fragmentary belt with silver mounts was aided by breaks that could be matched up in some places and the distribution of the mounts (reconstructive drawing by Ágnes Füredi).

from the ruined church were used in the construction of the new church in the 18th century. The masonry was reused to such an extent that not a single stone block remained in its original position (Fig. 7). Coins of Sigismund of Luxemburg were uncovered in the plastering found at the bottom of the foundation ditch, so the construction of the late medieval church can be placed in the time of Sigismund (Fig. 8). The foundation ditch traces out the details of the church's ground plan, but at the time being the small-scale excavation has only allowed for unsubstantiated conclusions, according to which the church probably was a structure with a square end to the chancel, it had a vestry and it was oriented in a northeast-southwest direction. However, on the basis of the evidence from the earliest coins (Kings István II, Béla II, Géza II), the beginnings of the building stretch back to the beginning or possibly the second third of the 12th century. The Sigismund-era remodeling, the late medieval burials and then the re-use of the stone from the walls in the 18th century disturbed the strata to such an extent that only two sections of remaining wall, oriented essentially in a northwest-southeast direction, allude to the Árpád Dynasty period church, which was constructed from rubble held together with high-quality gray mortar (Fig. 9).

Further research would be necessary to sketch out the entire ground plan, but so far the finds have not been disappointing. We came upon a belt decorated with silver studs at waist level of a disturbed skeleton of a small boy (Fig. 10). The belt is made of leather, and it has a line of silver studs pressed from a thin sheet of silver. The strap originally could have been between 90 and 100 cm long and about 2 cm wide. The studs run along the entire length of the belt, except for the section behind the eight-shaped buckle. The belt may have been too long for the deceased; it was wrapped around his waist, pulled through the buckle and then the rest of the strap that was too long, which was originally probably worn hanging down, was wrapped all the way around him again. There was a delicate, loosely-woven, gauze-like textile pattern corroded on the inner side of the belt in places, perhaps the imprint of the clothing of the deceased. The wood remains on



Fig. 11: Headdress in grave No. 67



Fig. 12: The bronze crucifix may have been placed in the hand of the deceased for burial.



Fig. 13: Rings were the most common find in the churchyard cemetery.



Fig. 14: In addition to the two gold forints of Sigismund of Luxemburg, during the excavation of the church and the cemetery over one hundred scattered medieval coins were found.

the back side may have come from the coffin, while the textile imprints seen in places on the surface of the mounts suggest a burial shroud.

Contemporary items of clothing included female headdresses (*párta*, Fig. 11), clasps, belt mounts and clothing ornaments, mounts of ornamented belts (so-called *pártaöv*) and ball buttons. There was a bronze crucifix at the pelvis of one of the deceased (Fig. 12). A large portion of the metal objects were unfortunately discovered as stray finds. They were found either in the layer of debris, the foundation ditch below this or in the disturbed soil of the cemetery. Further characteristic finds were iron nails and lead balls, some of which were deformed from slamming into the plastering of the church. Engraved, ribbed band rings and simple round rings were found in the largest numbers, but some more unusual objects did also come to light. The stout, braided silver ring with a hammered end (Fig. 13a) came from the layer of debris. The use of this type of ring was typical in the 11th–12th centuries.⁶ The glass-inlaid, fire-gilded silver ring (Fig. 13b) also lay in the layer of debris, and on the basis of its western European parallels it can be dated to the first half of the 14th century.⁷ A silver signet ring with an engraved head depicting a heron or crane – in all likelihood a heraldic animal – was also found in the layer of debris (Fig. 13c). The engraving is sharp and deep, piercing the thin silver sheet. Cranes appear on 13th–14th century coins, for example on the denar decorated with a tree of life of King Charles Robert, as well as in the coats of arms of many noble families originating from the Middle Ages.⁸ In antiquity and in the Middle Ages it symbolized vigilance.⁹ The seven letter circumscription, which appears in the frame made up of a repeated pattern, is a part of the composition. On the basis of the typeface, the ring was probably made in the 14th century. We also encounter a crane in the crest of the coat of arms of the Halász family that came to prominence in 1669, during the wars of re-conquest from the Ottomans, and played an important role in the resettlement of Dabas.¹⁰ The history of the gold coins buried in the Templom-domb area sometime in the 15th century must have been no less exciting (Fig. 14).

Archeologists generally are cautious about using the term treasure when they wish to characterize their finds, because this can easily downgrade the complex science of archeology to simple treasure hunting. It is a trite observation that spectacular relics do not advance research as much as the working out of connections during the study of section walls or the excavation ground plan. However, the gold coins, gilded jewelry, metal implements and decorative objects of Dabas indicate something that not even experts fully comprehend: it is not possible to judge our medieval villages and their inhabitants only on the basis of the terse written sources or the ordinary abandoned, vacated or looted excavated structures.

⁶ Szőke, Béla Miklós – Vándor, László: *Pusztaszentlászló Árpád-kori temetője / Arpadenzeitliches Gräberfeld von Pusztaszentlászló (Árpád Dynasty Cemetery in Pusztaszentlászló)*. *Fontes Archaeologici Hungariae* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1987), 51–52; Wolf, Mária: *Ecclesia Baptismalis, ecclesia parochialis. A borsodi ispánsági vár templomai / The churches of the ispán's castle at Borsod*. In: „...a halál árnyékának völgyében járok”. *A középkori templom körüli temetők kutatása* (“... I Walk in the Valley of the Shadow of Death”. Research into medieval churchyard cemeteries), ed. Ritoók, Ágnes – Simonyi, Erika (Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, 2005), 136; Türk, Attila: *Árpád-kori, templom körüli temető feltárása Szentés-Kaján, Temetőhalmon (Előzetes beszámoló a 2000–2001. évi ástásokról) / The excavation of a churchyard from the Árpadian Era at Szentés-Kaján, Temetőhalom*. In: „...a halál árnyékának völgyében járok”. *A középkori templom körüli temetők kutatása* (“... I Walk in the Valley of the Shadow of Death”. Research into medieval churchyard cemeteries), ed. Ritoók, Ágnes – Simonyi, Erika (Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, 2005), 213–219.

⁷ Similar rings were found in the Colmar Treasure (Alsace), which was buried at the time of the Black Death. Cherry, John: *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: Jewellery and Plate in Late Medieval Hoards*. In: *Treasure in the Medieval West*, ed. M. Tyler, Elizabeth (York: A York Medieval Press Publication in association with The Boydell Press, 2000), 157–174.

⁸ Magyarai, László: *Madárábrázolások a középkori címeres nemesleveleken (Depictions of Birds in Medieval Grants of Arms)*. *Aquila* 63–64 (1956–1957), 249–258.

⁹ Seibert, Jutta (ed.): *A keresztény művészet lexikona (Lexicon of Christian Art)* (Budapest: Corvina, 1986), 67.

¹⁰ Czagányi, László: *A Dabasi Református Egyházközség története tulajdon iratai tükrében (The History of the Dabas Reformed Church Congregation in Light of Its Documents)* (Dabas: Dabasi Református Egyházközség, 1993), 9. The foundation of the Reformed churches in Dabas and Gyón is also linked to the Halász family. We do not know of any earlier data related to the family, but we cannot rule out their connection to medieval Dabas.

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TARI, EDIT

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